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St. Petersburg Police Uncover Major Military Recruitment Scam

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Vasily Kuzmichenok / Moskva News Agency

Russian police arrested four men accused of defrauding soldiers out of their military salaries and bonuses meant for deployment in Ukraine, the Interior Ministry said Friday.

Law enforcement authorities said they are aware of three cases of fraud totaling 2.5 million rubles ($30,800). Investigators believe more than 40 people were defrauded, with total losses possibly exceeding 80 million rubles ($985,500).

Some of the scam victims are believed to have been killed while fighting in Ukraine.

According to a police statement, a St. Petersburg resident and three men from the neighboring Pskov region targeted men who had been previously rejected for military service, including for health reasons.

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Since at least mid-2024, the group allegedly posed as middlemen with connections in military enlistment offices and promised to help the recruits secure contracts in exchange for a fee. Once recruited, the men were taken to St. Petersburg and signed into service using falsified documents.

The recruits were then instructed to open bank accounts to receive state payments for military service. Police claimed the group convinced the soldiers to hand over their bank cards and online banking information under the pretense of managing their payments and deducting their fees.

The suspected fraudsters then moved the payments into their own accounts, according to the Interior Ministry.

Police said they seized electronics and bank cards, as well as counterfeit stamps and forms, during searches of apartments and several recruitment offices.

Interior Ministry spokeswoman Irina Volk said police were working to identify additional victims of the scheme and seize the fraud group's assets to compensate those affected.

The four men implicated in the scheme were placed in pre-trial detention and face up to 10 years in prison on charges of fraud.

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